Other People's Cabins: German Inversions of Onkel Tom's Hütte

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ABSTRACT   Kristin Moriah's essay is rooted in extensive archival work in the US and Germany, examining the transatlantic circulation of Uncle Tom's Cabin through markets of performance and literature in and between Germany and the United States. The essay follows the performative tropes of Uncle Tom's Cabin from its originary political resonances to the present-day restaurants, train-stops, and housing projects named for the novel. Moriah reveals how the figurations of blackness arising from these texts are foundational to the construction of Germanness and American-German relations in the early 20th century and beyond.

In this essay I consider the amplifications of Harriet Beecher Stowe's work as they progressed through American, African American, German and German American culture because of what those amplifications can tell us about the depth and breadth of the Black Atlantic. This work invites a consideration of the diffusive nature of black performance and diaspora by looking far inland. There are many ways to analyze the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Germany and to trace to its movements back and forth across the Black Atlantic, but I will limit my current discussion to the theatrical and performative aspects of this exchange, performance itself being a notoriously capacious genre. Orienting myself by way of Joseph Roach's work, I argue that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) created a very specific "vortex" of performative behavior that was potentially lucrative and liberating for black performers while also providing a way for pervasive racist iconography to enter German culture.

The novel and its outcroppings were used to define blackness and Americanness while simultaneously aiding the formation of German identity. The relationship between African American performers and the German stage at the turn-of-the-century receives relatively little critical attention today, but Germany was an important stop on the vaudeville circuit for American entertainers. Black performance is important because this relationship teaches us the limitlessness of the black Diaspora and its crucial impact on modernity. Including African American performance in our understanding of early Afro-European studies can provide us with a starting point from which we can theorize the ways in which space and national identity coalesce in performances of race.

Thus, I argue that Transatlantic performances of blackness that developed from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are about the fiction of blackness as it is inscribed on the body, in the text, and in the world. They are about the ways that this fictive blackness gives birth to politicized senses of self as well as novel modes of reading and seeing. This performance of blackness is a convoluted process that brings whiteness into being across nation spaces while defining its subjects. In light of globalization and imperial efforts at the dawn of the twenty-first century, it has become clear that black performance helps "white" people to establish their position in the world as political/politicized bodies and to understand exactly how they are similar to those who look like them, in spite of old animosities and regional anomalies. Thus, the milieu into which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was born and became a

potent racial signifier for distant German readers and viewers resonates strongly here. In this essay, I investigate tropes of black performance which originated with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as they have circulated through Germany.

A wild and unprecedented success, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had a broad international reach. Numerous unofficial translations appeared worldwide soon after its publication in 1852 and drew international attention to the American anti-slavery movement. It is hard to overstate the impact of the novel in its time. Clearly, "Stowe had made the slavery issue sell, and it sold on a huge scale not only at home but also abroad" (Meer 5). Stowe's novel also made the slavery issue visible across mediums, including the popular stage. Indeed, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s "first stage production occurred during its serialization" (Lott 213). In the process, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* promoted much more than anti-slavery politics. Regarding 19th-century American popular culture, theater historian John Frick argues that the Tom show was the "most influential in disseminating racial imperatives and attitudes" (21). The novel's dissemination throughout the English-speaking world has been widely studied. Most notably, Sarah Meer's earlier, influential study, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (2005) takes Tom Mania in Britain as its focus.

The deep impact of Stowe's novel in transatlantic, non-Anglophone contexts is worthy of consideration. And yet, as critics like John Mackay have pointed out, little is known about the responses to variations on Stowe's work across genres and cultures (Mackay 14). Mackay attempts to rectify this oversight in *True Songs of Freedom: Uncle Tom's Cabin in Russian Culture and Society* (2013). Edith Maclean's dissertation "'Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Germany," published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1910 as part of their Americana Germanica series, was one of the earliest studies of the transnational impact of Harriet Beecher Stowe's work and remains an important touchstone. In her more recent examination of the reception of American slave narratives in Germany, "Cultural Mobility Between Boston and Berlin: How Germans Have Read and Reread Narratives of American Slavery" (2010), Heike Paul identifies *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a key text in the study of cultural mobility between Germany and the United States (124). Here, I argue that attention to the performative iterations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Germany reveals the long reach of Stowe's novel and its importance to multiple, overlapping discourses about racial identity in a global context. I contend that audience enthusiasm for and reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sets the stage for the performance of race in a way that trained Germans to conceptualize race and circumscribed opportunities for future generations of Black performers.

The deployment of African American signifiers in German contexts and the weight of what Toni Morrison would term "a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (6) in Europe; in other words, to seek out the impact of figurative "blackness" and "whiteness" in transatlantic contexts come to bear powerfully here. This stands in opposition to some contemporary understandings of blackness as a relatively new European phenomenon. While studies like Sander Gilman's *On Blackness Without Blacks* (1982) have historicized the black (and often Muslim) presence of blacks in Germany and Austria before the advent of German colonialism, Northern Europe is still commonly viewed as an intrinsically white space. This belief is embedded in the philosophy of right-wing hate groups like Pegida, as evidenced by the rhetoric that has proliferated during their recent upsurge. In *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (1991), Audre Lorde's former students and colleagues trouble such notions and draw direct connections between Afro-German and African American political movements. I attempt to broaden our understanding of the impact of figurative blackness across American and German

cultures. Speaking of the work of figurative blackness in the area of identity formation in mainstream (white) American literature, Morrison reveals that

> through significant and underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers people their work with the signs and bodies of this presence – one can see that a real of fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness. (7)

How it was crucial first to a sense of Americanness, then German-Americanness and Germanness, is my particular concern. I submit that, in spite of significant geographical and cultural differences, American-styled blackness has played an important role in German culture since the mid-nineteenth century, giving Germans a sense of their place in the new world order and their own understanding of relatively new concepts of whiteness. The functions of this Africanist presence have traveled forth, and doubled back between, Germany and the United States for centuries in a mechanism made possible by, but not limited to, long-standing German American cultural exchanges embedded in German American communities.

The milieu into which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was born and became a potent racial signifier for distant German readers and viewers resonates strongly here. One need not be an enslaver or a direct participant in the slave trade to understand that a slave is a subject drained of agency, an abject assembly of consciousness. And yet, the potential uses of this subject and its agency are enigmatic. I borrow from Fred Moten, among others, when I think about blackness as a constant cultural presence that defies expectations and resists containment. In *In the Break* (2003), Moten gestures towards the polyvalent nature of blackness and its mutually constitutive effects while affirming the sonic qualities of blackness within mainstream culture. For Moten, blackness is the object that possesses. It is the resonant subject-object. Blackness makes and unmakes its subjects and objects through many mechanisms, including performance and cultural consumption. For popular audiences, viewers, and readers in turn-of-the-century Germany, blackness meant much the same thing.

I am particularly concerned with the ways the novel and its outcroppings were used to define blackness and Americanness while simultaneously aiding the formation of German identity. The relationship between African American performers and the German stage at the turn-of-the-century receives relatively little critical attention today, but Germany was an important stop on the vaudeville circuit for American entertainers. Tina Campt's *Other Germans* (2007) is one of the most well-known works in the field of Afro-German studies and one of the most comprehensive. In this text, Campt's primary concern is the question of racial purity as it related to Black Germans during the Nazi era. While performance is not Campt's main interest, one of her subjects, Fasia Jansen, became a singer-activist after the war (163), rallying for the peace, women's and labor movements in Germany and internationally. Notable studies of Black performers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (2008) and Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (2006) are undeniably important because of their painstaking attention to the significance of international Black performance in the modern period, but they do not take Black diasporic performance in Germany as their primary focus. The work of private collector and independent researcher Rainer Lotz does, and it remains the most important intervention in this field. Lotz's *Black People, Entertainers of African descent in Germany, and Europe* (1997) and *Black Europe* (2013) contain compilations of numerous years of archival research on Black performance in Germany and are primary resources in this line of inquiry. In light of this work and my own archival research, I argue that the presence of African American

performers in Europe in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century trained German viewers to conceptualize both blackness and national identity.

Long before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published, many German Americans had opposed slavery. In 1688, Francis Daniel Pastorius initiated the Germantown Quaker "Protest Against Negro Slavery" at a Religious Society of Friends meeting. This marked the first moment in which Quakers would openly denounce slavery and thus the beginning of a central role for Quakers in the antislavery movement. Nearly two centuries later, many German immigrants who came to the United States after the failed German Revolution of 1848 became strident abolitionists and participated in the antislavery movement. In her 1910 study *Uncle Tom's Cabin in Germany*, Grace Edith Maclean suggested that in Germany, the failed 1848 revolution created an atmosphere ripe for Stowe's antislavery work:

The influence of Arthur Schopenhauer, the father of pessimism, was heavy upon the minds of the people, and with eagerness and curiosity, the book-hungry public sought any disclosure of the shame of social conditions. The newspapers, journals, and books of the day were full of merciless criticism and discontent. It was this soured and despairing public that received *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, and read it with sympathy and enthusiasm, for it reflected the state of mind and conditions of society existent among the readers themselves (22).

Like these American special interest groups, Germans also found ways to appropriate images of black suffering (which fueled the abolitionist movement and decorated the pages of many editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) for their own political purposes. In *Berlin Coquette: Prostitution and the New German Woman, 1890–1933* (2014), Jill Suzanne Smith briefly gestures towards the ways the American abolition movement provided a model for the German feminist movement against anti-prostitution legislation in the Wilhelmine era. This German identification with downtrodden, enslaved African Americans was not unproblematic. Maclean and Smith's work points to a cultural predisposition on the part of the Germans that contemporary feminist critics might link to larger debates on the nature of sympathy in literature and a "subversive-colonization" paradigm in which the "'subversion' side holds up sympathy's ability to create solidarity with the disenfranchised, while the 'colonization' angle emphasizes its disciplinary function and its tendency to elide agency and (especially racial) difference and to colonize the subjectivity of its objects" (Crosby 379). The subversive–colonization paradigm does not necessarily result in social recognition or equality; such impulses contributed to the colonial climate that emerged from the racist politics of the Atlantic slave trade.

The tensions in this paradigm are evident in the uneven fruits of Harriet Beecher Stowe's labor. Numerous translations, adaptations and children's versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared on the German market almost immediately after the book's initial publication. Unauthorized German translations of Stowe's work were also published in the United States. Harriet Beecher Stowe herself traveled to Germany in 1856, visiting several towns and cities including Berlin, Heidelberg, Düsseldorf, and Leipzig over the course of three weeks (Maclean 17). In Germany she was known as "die berühmte Verfasserin von Onkel Tom's Hütte," (the famous author of Uncle Tom's Hut), or "die Humanistin" (the humanist), and her book was called the "Evangelium der Negersklaven" (Gospel of the Negro Slave). The craze for Onkel Tom's Hütte created a wider demand for "Sklavengeschichten," slave stories, and German-authored novels with similar themes began to appear. A reviewer from the Freiburger Zeitung claimed that "because of the books uniqueness and "its political and social 'tendenz', it was bound to be circulated and read, and it left behind a picture of the black race, which could not be banished. The negro characters are considered by all well drawn, and to form a 'gallery of black faces'" (Maclean 41). And yet,

in this kind of gallery, black lives are objects to be both consumed and traded upon, lacking the depth that would allow viewers a more nuanced recognition of the politics that informed black struggles for freedom in the 19th century and their expansive political stakes.

As the Freiburger Zeitung reviewer illustrates, the "picture of the black race" presented by Stowe left a lasting impression on the German public. These pictures were both figurative and literal, and the "gallery of black faces" based on Stowe's novel soon included blackface minstrels. In the midst of this vortex of Circum-Atlantic cultural exchange, it becomes difficult to trace the beginnings and end of the use of the blackface minstrelsy of which Tom Shows have become so closely identified with. For example, during the nineteenth century, a German dramatization of *Onkel Tom's Hütte* (1853) by Therese von Megerle was presented in German American theaters in Pennsylvania. As the various Tom Shows that were developed from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* made their back and forth between the United States and Germany, so did a troubling appetite for African American performers, negersongs and negertanz. These initial tendencies towards blackface opened the doors to performances that held greater potential for subversion. Riffing off of Miss Ophelia and Topsy, "Belle Davis and her Pickaninnies" were immensely popular in Germany; one of the only surviving recordings of Davis was made in Berlin. Late nineteenth-century performing acts like the "Georgia Piccaninnies of America [sic]" were relatively unknown in the United States, but they were able to make their living almost entirely in Europe, and well past their youth. There would be many other such groups. Dancer Ida Forsyne began her career in pickaninny shows in the United States, but she made a name for herself in Europe and promoted herself as "Topsy" across the continent and in several large Das Programm advertisements. Jayna Brown, noting the way "stories proliferating out of plantation lore melted together European colonial fictions with U.S. antebellum plantation nostalgia" (58) identifies the Topsy figure as one who resists containment or absorption in Western practices of discipline and time. Thus, performances of childishness and servitude that were a feature of most Topsy and pickaninny acts, as demonstrated by women like Davis and Forsyne, and their troupes, represented moments at which performances of blackness were most resistant to cooptation or easy assimilation into either German or American political agendas.

Video 1: Recording of Belle Davis, "Just Because She Made Dem Goo Goo Eyes"

Onkel Tom's Hütte's role as a vehicle for the visualization of monolithic blackness funnels into questions about the novel's (and its attendant cultural productions) relationship to German colonization. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 saw the gathering of powerful

European nations to divide the African continent and establish complete colonial dominance over its peoples. Before this meeting, Germany's influence over the continent had been minimal in comparison to that of major slave-trading nations like England, France, Spain, and Portugal. After the Berlin Conference, Germany would emerge as a new colonial force in Africa and begin to engage with racial otherness in ways that were particular to the dawn of the modern era. Colonialization resulted in new conflations between blackness and servitude throughout the Western visual field. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* served as a cultural script for Germany and other European countries with imperial agendas. In *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (2011) David Ciarlo delineates the connections between German imperialism, racist tropes in advertising and visual culture during the late nineteenth century, and the impact of German-American cultural exchanges on these fields. Among other things, Ciarlo argues that Tom shows "familiarized European and German audiences with the racial stereotypes that were common in the slaveholding and postslavery segregated United States" (219), came to represent a certain Americanness in terms of visual aesthetics, and that they resonated "with both pro-and Anti-American sentiments" (219). Jayna Brown suggests that Topsy and other pickaninnies represented "figures of English and European colonial subjecthood" (65). In other words, "the picaninny was a lasting figure for the primitive; the project of civilizing Topsy was a metaphor for colonial missionary programs and their agendas" (65).

Traced from the mid-nineteenth century, changes in illustrated versions of *Onkel Tom's Hütte* reflect Germany's increasing colonial ambitions through the use of lush tropical iconography and increasingly exotic landscapes. The transformations I am referring to here are best exemplified in *Onkel Tom's Hütte, Oder Des Leben der Sklaven in Amerika, nach Harriet Beecher Stowe, fur die Jugend*, as translated by Leopold Streich in 1863. Printed on a lush green cloth, the cover for Streich's *Onkel Tom's Hutte* evokes a jungle setting. The title is written in a bamboo-style script and framed by palm trees. Monkeys, snakes, tropical birds, and alligators play in their branches. Tom and his family are framed by vines above the title. To a lesser extent, undated editions of Bruno Hoffman and Carl Koch's *Onkel Tom's Hütte: Erzählung Aus Dem Fernen Westen* (1930) also feature lush tropical settings on the cover and exemplify the conflation between black labor and colonialism, although in this particular instance, the unsettled territory is also imagined as the Western United States. In early editions of *Onkel Tom's Hütte*, illustrations were often copied directly from American or English editions of the novel, or hewed closely to the originals. These early illustrations depicted popular episodes in the narrative, like Eliza's flight over the Ohio River or Eliza's son dancing for Mr. Haley. As Germany became more involved with African cotton production, *Onkel Tom's Hütte* illustrations began to focus less and less on popular episodes in the text and more on incidents of black manual labor, especially of blacks and cotton. These illustrations functioned as visual justifications for colonialism in the same way Tom Shows could also support proslavery sentiments. This conflation of enslaved African Americans with African laborers also revealed an increased interest in visual tropes of race. While the popularity of minstrel shows in Germany peaked in the 1880s (Ciarlo 218) German performing arts journals and trade periodicals like *Das Programm* and *Der Artist* reveal a surge in racialized performance in the 1890s, just a few years after Germany's first colonial engagement with Africa. Black stage performance in Germany would flourish in this way until the end of the Weimar era.

It is perhaps fitting to briefly gloss the actual space of Onkel Tom's Hütte, which resonated deeply in Germany as phenomenological ideal in ways that are difficult to imagine on American soil. In Berlin, the "Idyllische Wald-Restaurant" named for Onkel Tom's Hütte was a popular entertainment site. In the 1920s, the Zehlendorf neighborhood in which the restaurant was located would become home to the Onkel Tom's Hütte social housing

development designed by renowned modern architect Bruno Taut. Bruno Taut's Waldseidlung is one of the most important examples of modernist public housing. Constructed between 1926 and 1931, the early development "housed some five hundred units in three types, set in beautiful parkland on the edge of the Grunewald, but with a direct railway link to the city" (Boyd and Whyte 465). Its forest setting was pragmatic in keeping both with "the social democratic ambition to create housing that was generously provided with light, air, and access to green space" (Boyd and Whyte 465) and the need to house working-class people in inexpensive areas of the city. Providing adequate housing for "German" people was a key element of German nationalism in the modern era. The newly formed Weimar Republic took the creation of public housing as one its key elements, While the increasing urbanization that fostered the birth of the Metropolis began in the Wilhelmine period, it was only in 1918, under the Weimar government, that a concrete public housing development policy was enacted. Barbara Miller's *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (1985), remains a useful guide to how architecture was used to define the new values of the Weimar Republic. Weimar housing policies, a central achievement of the newly formed republic, were unique in the world at the time. Later, the National Social Party would explicitly use public housing as a keystone of its definition of the volk and the cityscape as a reflection of National Socialist Weltanschauung. However, while the National Socialists party also claimed that the creation of public housing was important to them, the construction of public housing was cut under their regime, and modernist architecture was thoroughly rebuked.

While playing out and translating the lives and living spaces of enslaved people's, guests and residents of the Onkel Tom's Hütte housing project both explicitly and implicitly shaped their own national identity. In the words of Taut,

> Pride of place does not go to any single attribute of the home, but to the combination of all its attributes. What has to be achieved is an organism that is the perfectly fitting shell of contemporary human beings (defined by their fruitful attributes), and that is in the sense akin to clothing – an extension of clothing, so to speak. (The New Home: Woman as Creative Spirit 467)

Or perhaps skin, specifically a skin or shell that reflect commonalities across international and racial boundaries. Slipping in and out of modernist housing complexes, German laborers participated in a discourse about race, labor, and politics. Andrew Zimmerman reminds us of the ways German social scientists perceived similarities between the situation in the American South and that in the Prussian East (70), thus also recognizing the similarities between the German proletariat and Blacks in America.

It is not insignificant then that Taut's Waldseidlung was nestled in Zehlendorf, a neighborhood named for homes deliberately aligned with black primitivism and white colonialism in the European imagination. In some ways, the very existence of the complex named after a novel so fundamental to the abolition movement brings to mind the radical politics of the 1848'ers and their understanding of the connection between European serfs and enslaved black Americans. Taut's Waldseidlung can be understood as a tribute to interracial collaboration and political activism. Indeed, Esra Ackan explains that, "Taut was one of the few architects of the modern period who were consciously engaged in understanding these tensions and potentials inherent in cross-cultural translations" (Akcan 9). Bruno Taut's architectural writings reveal a preoccupation with transnational principles of architecture that was rooted in his interest in non-European design and his belief in its superiority. The challenge that Taut's work posed to colonial authority is perhaps best illustrated by his forced exile during the rule of the National Socialist party. The backlash against a purely functional conception of mass housing, which was already gathering pace by 1930, found a natural support after 1933 in National Socialist ideology

that damned modernist architecture and urbanism as Bolshevist, and favored instead housing that reflected the simple life on German soil, drawing heavily for its symbolism on vernacular models. In Berlin, this urge found quintessential expression in the SS-Kameradschaftsseidlung, built in Zehlendorf in 1937-39. Sited, with a certain irony, almost directly across the road from Taut's Onkel-Tom's-Hütte development, this housing for the SS came straight from the pages of the Brother's Grimm, with high-pitched roofs, red tiles, and rustic shutters.

Ironically, the neighborhood's Kameradschaftsseidlung more closely represent a literal interpretation of the slave cabins the neighborhood is named after. For Taut and his contemporaries, the Onkel Tom's Hütte complex and the novel that inspired it represented a complex negotiation of European ideals and rough translations of African American culture that did not necessarily bolster white supremacy.

This understanding of how Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* impacted Germany's largest city draws on performance studies and the ways in which this discipline allows us to consider how performances of identity and citizenship occur within the urban landscape. In her introduction to *Performing the City*, the 2014 TDR special issue on the relationship between cities and performance, Carol Martin claims that

> Cities are live performances. How people behave in the streets, in the parks, in the outdoor markets, in the stadiums, inside buildings—the halls of learning, museums, government offices, courtrooms, theatres, apartments, restaurants, cafes, and hotels—and riding public and private transportation gives cities their unique character, ambience, and tone. (Martin 11)

Martin's treatise also hints at the importance of architecture and urban planning to embodied performances of identity such as, in the case of the Uncle Tom's Hütte restaurant and resort, colonial identity. For if "geographic place and aesthetic experience are inevitably entangled in ways that deserve careful consideration," (Martin 15) then "the physical spaces and structures of urban environments result from a performance of ideas that signify organizational and hierarchical problems and possibilities including those of political, religious, and cultural systems" (Martin 12). In the same issue of TDR, Imanuel Schipper reaffirms the importance of the work of French theoretician Henri Lefebvre (1974) and his conceptualization of space,

> with the observation that spaces do not exist per se, but rather arise as a social product, as relations between the perceptions and actions of people and the built environment. In other words, a space (including urban space) is a co-production of given circumstances and the experiences and actions of human beings. Secondly, as urban space depends on people, it always has the potential to be reshaped, transformed, and used differently. (Schipper 22)

Through Henri Lefebvre's work and in keeping with recent work on performance in the urban landscape, we can begin to understand the ways in which the physical structure of Uncle Tom's Cabin, understood as a space of white supremacy and domination, was perfectly at home in the German metropolis. As such, Heike Paul has outlined the continuing impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* across the German political and cultural landscape, including its controversial use as a racial slur in coverage of Barack Obama's election in the German newspaper *Die Tagezeitung*. I argue that I argue that performances of blackness in the German metropolis remain tied to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and that those performances had a profound impact on the formation of racial identity for white Germans.

I have outlined some of the foundations of black performance in Germany at the beginning of the modern era. It is my contention that early engagements with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* set the stage for later forms of black performance. The novel spawned a set of visual tropes that took root on the German popular stage even as they contributed to American blackface minstrelsy. Performances of blackness on the popular stage in both Germany and the United States evolved from a shared set of racist visual tropes. These visual tropes, while ostensibly creating definitive limits for the personhood of the black other, also created a means by which whites on both sides of the Atlantic could come to understand themselves and their own relationship to nationhood. This phenomenon became evident in Berlin's urban landscape, starting at the turn of the century. Thus, iterations of Uncle Tom's cabin as a physical site in the city of Berlin have much to tell us about race, space, and performances of nationhood.

The current space of Onkel Tom's Hütte poses a challenge for those who are conscious of the numerous ways Harriet Beecher Stowe's text has been deployed, and of its afterlives. Ex-pat American artist Paula Ross has written about her own confoundment around the stop, in light of its cultural baggage, asking herself, during her initial encounter, "if this was some kind of German joke? What on earth would possess the transportation system to name a station after a character in an American text that carried so much baggage?" But, to put it plainly, the elegance of Taut's project, these "projects," are so much more beautiful than any North American public housing development that currently exists, or that possibly ever will be, that they defy even these initial reactions. These cottage/cabin/apartment buildings nestled between soaring pines miles from the bustling center of Berlin were built out of necessity and a sense of mutual obligation, an obligation to a people quite like oneself with similar claims to land and space. Public housing by the volk for the volk, dignified living in a way that continues to be denied to so many black folk on American soil. In this housing project I read a recognition of mutual humanity through the experience and being of the other that does not always translate across bodies, space and time.[1]

La cabaña del tío Tom | 1/2 | G. V. Radvanyi | 1965

Video 2: Clip from 1960s German film adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, dubbed in Spanish.

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Notes

1. Editorial note: The article has been edited by the author. ↩

👤 **Bio**

Kristin Moriah

Kristin Moriah is the editor of Black Writers and the Left (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013) and the co-editor of Adrienne Rich: Teaching at CUNY, 1968-1974 (Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative, 2014). Her writing can be found in Callaloo Theater Journal, TDR and Understanding Blackness Through Performance (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Moriah is completing a dissertation on African American literature and performance in transnational contexts at CUNY Graduate Center. Her research has been funded through grants from the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canad, The Freie Universitat Berlin and the Graduate Center's Advanced Research Collaborative. She is a 2014-15 @IRADAC_GC Archival Dissertation Fellow and spring 2015 Scholar-in-Residence at the NYPL Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Sometimes she tweets @moriahgirl.